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18 September 1985

MOSCOW'S SUMMIT COURSE AND THE SHEVARDNADZE VISITWhat Moscow Wants

The Soviets in the past year have adopted a range of revised approaches to their problems. Gorbachev and many of the people he is promoting represent a new generation of leadership; a series of significant, if not dramatic, changes are being inaugurated aimed at economic revitalization; and a new tack has been taken toward the West.

- Since last Fall, in fact, the Soviets have backed off their conflictive diplomatic course in favor of recreating a more cooperative atmosphere which ideally, as they relate, would see a return to the "detente" atmosphere of the 1970s.
- The Soviets believe that if they can nudge the US back to pursuing a cooperative, problem-solving relationship with the USSR as a first order of business rather than first demanding Soviet concessions that would reduce major asymmetric threats to Western security--e.g., the Soviet hard target capability--they can then better reduce the long-term US threat to the Soviet military posture, that is SDI.
- Moscow knows its bellicose diplomacy has failed to stop first INF and now SDI. SDI threatens at a minimum to upset the current pace of the strategic competition, which Moscow is comfortable with, and adds much uncertainty to where the "correlation of forces" will lie in the years ahead; if it works, it could render much of Soviet doctrine and investment to the ashcan.

Gorbachev also is deeply concerned that the USSR's current economic problems will make it difficult to aggressively compete with the US for at least the next several years. The Soviets fear SDI and other strategic weapons programs favored by the Administration not only because of the new military dangers and uncertainties they pose, but also because these programs threaten to force the diversion of significant incremental resources--financial, technological, and manpower--that the Soviet Union can ill afford.

The Soviets appear to believe they need Western economic support to regain higher growth rates and get the modernity that the Soviet economy needs to again become vibrant and better meet consumer demands. Moscow needs a much more cooperative atmosphere in East-West relations to bring this about.

The Solution

Moscow's strategy is to induce and cajole the Administration in the leadup to the Summit to accept a framework for further NST talks at Geneva that would have the US agree to restrain the pace of its SDI effort (hopefully to restrict it to the laboratory) in return for which the USSR would agree to consider non-trivial mutual reductions in strategic offensive forces. The Soviets want first-off to gain US agreement to the principle that SDI is

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negotiable; gaining this, they might even countenance significant offensive force cuts insofar as they minimally detracted from their overall strategic posture, most critically their hard target kill capability.

- Moscow would hope that US agreement to such a framework would lead to increased domestic and allied pressures on the Administration to reach an agreement as soon as possible, that pressure causing the Administration to accept a minimal price rather than stick to a demand that the USSR give up its first strike advantages.
- At worst, the Soviets might anticipate accepting numerically substantial force cuts that would not alter Soviet strategic advantages.

The Soviets see such an agreement in principle at the Summit as a major goal in their strategy to reimpose a detente atmosphere on East-West relations and pick its fruits. Through that substantive and environmental achievement, from Moscow's perspective, lies the solution to the current strategic and economic dangers to the USSR, and also more favorable prospects for other Soviet global goals.

Moscow's very political approach is aimed at gaining leverage on the Administration through the US domestic scene and the allies more than it is aimed at persuading the US through its arguments. The Soviets will seek to add to this pressure in the weeks ahead through Shevardnadze's efforts at the UN and Gorbachev's summit with Mitterand.

- In Paris, Gorbachev might unfold an INF proposal meant to appeal to NATO that is linked to Soviet satisfaction on SDI.
- The Soviets also might soon claim they have deployed no more than the 378 SS-20s [REDACTED]

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Shevardnadze's Visit

Shevardnadze most importantly will want to ascertain the extent to which Moscow is making headway in its goal of obtaining the agreement in principle at the Summit that it wants. To elicit this, he probably will review Soviet positions and proposals, and further elaborate on Soviet statements and hints about how far Moscow might go. [REDACTED]

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- In Soviet terms, he will bring "definite" ideas, probably about SDI definitions and strategic weapons numbers. He also might offer some satisfaction on the Krasnoyarsk radar or other compliance issues.
- The Soviets probably believe that the results of Shevardnadze's meetings with the President and the Secretary will be the strongest signal they will receive about the Administration's intentions prior to the Summit.
- Key deals traditionally have been cut at the ministerial level. While US newspapers have said the Administration has just begun internal discussions on the Summit, the Soviets likely take this as a smokescreen for a tough US position, particularly in light of the President's press conference.

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- If a deal is not cut now, the Soviets will hope that they will have another chance before the Summit--during a possible Shevardnadze visit to the UN in October or a Shultz visit to Moscow. Meanwhile, they will proceed in their efforts to pressure the Administration--through domestic and Western opinion--to come around. They also might further pursue efforts at developing a backchannel (if this is not already going on).

On regional issues, Shevardnadze probably will voice standard Soviet positions and try to determine if the US is doing any rethinking. In light of recent Soviet comments [REDACTED] in Moscow, he might express some slight give on Afghanistan to see what he can elicit. He will react strongly to US comments on human rights issues, but this could be an occasion on which a gesture on behalf of some dissidents or emigration cases will be made. He could link a Soviet gesture on human rights to a US gesture on trade.

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